

Stans...

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Stans...

by [spearmiintt](#)

Summary

Clay and George have never gotten along as the polar opposites of Elmswood High.
@GeorgeNotFound and @dreamwastaken on Twitter, though...

chapter one.

George isn't angry very often. He's not really frustrated at all mostly, usually just stressed or tired. But today was different. "What the hell, Clay?" he seethed. "We've had that bus reserved for my team for a month now, and you're telling me you had to have the exact same bus?"

Clay, the taller, green-eyed quarterback, merely laughed and looked down at George as his teammate watched with an amused smile on his face. "Well, I can't do much about that now, who knew the school was going to give the football team the same bus?" he asked without a hint of genuinity in his voice. "Oh, I'm George, I think I deserve a bus all to myself and five other nerds just because we can speak fast!" he mocked, laughing harder and harder as George merely glared. "Go jack off or whatever your little group does in the library all day." And he sauntered off, his teammate clapping him on the back as they chuckled.

George took a deep breath and felt a cooling modicum of calm settle like a blanket over his simmering temper. It would be annoying as hell to book another bus, but Clay was right. There was nothing he could do about it now.

"fuck american football, their players are all dumb as hell. /hj" George tweets later that night, smiling a bit as an almost-immediate response from his closest friend on the app rolls in through his notifications.

"@GeorgeNotFound oomf? :(i play football" from @dreamwastaken.

The brunette scoffed fondly, turning away from his thick stack of speech cards for a moment to quickly paste the link to "The Only Exception" by Paramore in the replies.

A second later, "@dreamwastaken quoted your tweet and said: *'are we about to kiss rn? /r /hj'*"

George merely rolls his eyes, feeling a light flush rise on his face as he types back: *"i'm going to bed"* with a few eye-roll emojis.

The debate notes were annoying to highlight, though, George's eyes quickly itching as he runs them far too quickly for their liking for the parts he wants to speak on at their next tournament. His thoughts, straying from the boring task in front of him, landed on Clay. They'd never particularly liked each other, being blatantly opposite from the other; George the quietly intellectual debate captain, Clay the rambunctious quarterback. Still, there was no basis on why Clay had decided that taking George's bus was necessary. It wasn't that big of a deal, but it still frustrated George as he thought about it, mainly since he knew it'd be a pain to reschedule a bus that quickly.

The next day drags on slowly, bringing George closer to the reality that the tournament is quickly approaching, and he hasn't even finished highlighting his stack of speech cards, nor began to run the novice debaters through final preparations.

"Hi," he introduces himself to the bored-looking secretary sitting behind a rather large monitor.

"Yes?" she eventually drawls, looking him up and down.

George knows he must look slightly frazzled now, his hair sticking up as a result of him constantly running his fingers through it, thick binder almost overflowing with un-highlighted notes.

"Uh," he begins. "Can I have the list of unreserved buses for next week?"

She looks at him for a long, slightly judgmental moment. “For what?” she asks, looking away to type a few words into her computer.

“The debate team,” George answers immediately.

The secretary turns away from the screen. “Your football friend’s already been in here asking about buses,” she explains. “I suggest you go to him and talk about it, seeing as your teams will be sharing a bus to Mooreville High next Tuesday.”

“Sharing a-” George begins, but quickly ends his sentence as he masks his confusion. “Okay, thank you,” he nods.

He knew he’d never admit to being confused in front of Clay, though. Sharing a bus wasn’t the worst thing that could happen to him, and he could always try to figure it out on his own time.

Coaching for debate goes slowly, though. George wants nothing more than to go home and collapse into his welcoming bed for a much-needed nap, yet he’s instead at the school library an hour after he’s supposed to be home, walking a first-year debater through cross-examination techniques.

“So if he asks you about the economic recession of 2008, you have to refer back to your Smith card and make it clear that you’re referring back to it, or you’ll get points cuffed from your score,” he explains, putting on a sense of confidence though he knows exactly how tired he is. “Just cite your source by saying “according to my Smith 2009 card”, or something like that.”

Lily, the almond-eyed sophomore that he’s been partnered with this season, nods. “Okay. Thank you, George, it means a lot to me,” she says after marking down a few notes on everything he’s just told her. “Are we meeting tomorrow in the cafeteria before taking the bus to Mooreville?”

“About that,” he sighs, massaging his temples for a second with his knuckles. “I found out we’re sharing a bus with the football team today, but I don’t know why, which is what I’m working on finding out.”

“Oh,” Lily manages, though it’s obvious that she’s taken aback. “Well, I’m sure it’ll be fine,” she tries to reassure him.

“Yeah, I’m not too worried about it,” George shrugs, though the brewing pit of confusion in his mind screams otherwise. “I’ll figure it out, see you tomorrow.”

Only, he’s leaving the school and he runs straight into the person he wants to see least after such a long day. Clay.

“George,” the green-eyed senior calls his name.

George sighs before turning around, his last hope of just ignoring the other person demolished with the sound of his name. “Yes?” he manages, turning around and nearly jumping back at how close they are, forcing him to confront how much taller Clay is compared to him as he looks up and meets his eyes.

“I, uh,” the taller one falters for a second. “I just wanted to let you know that we’re actually sharing a bus to Mooreville, I didn’t, um, take your bus?” he finishes somewhat lamely. “Anyways,” he plows on. “It’s because our game is at the same time and place as your, uh, thing.”

“My tournament, yeah,” George fills in for him warily. “That’s fine.” Only, Clay doesn’t leave after a moment of silence between the two, him scratching awkwardly at the back of his neck. “Can I... help you with anything else?” George raises a questioning eyebrow.

“Can we have the back of the bus?” the green-eyed teen rushes out in one breath.

George nearly laughs with the ridiculousness of it. “Listen,” he scoffs. “I could not care less on where your team of simple-brained oafs sits, alright? As long as it’s not with us.”

He catches it as Clay lets a small glimpse of his cringe at George’s harsh words slip through, and almost worries he’s gone too far with the insult.

But after a split second, he’s reassured with a sharp “Whatever, nerd,” from the blonde as he turns and walks off.

Three hours later, George wakes up from his long-overdue nap to a tweet from Dream.

“ how was everyone’s day? i had a kinda sucky interaction with an irl that i wish i were friends with :/”

For some reason, George’s groggy mind immediately shoots to him and Clay’s situation, though he comes to and shakes the thought with disgust. There was no way, in a thousand years, that he’d ever see himself befriend Clay.

He sends Dream the tweet with a simple *“ hey, everything ok? :) ”*

A second later, a reply: *“ yeah, i just wish him and i got along more, he’s really smart and cool, but i think he just thinks i don’t like him :(”*

Clay. Clay was smart. He was cool. He was popular, even, always seemingly having a solid group of friends around him, going to parties frequently (George knew, he saw the Snapchat stories).

He didn’t know what possessed him to type back his next message, but he quickly sent back, *“ in kinda a similar situation :/ guess that’s something we have in common haha! ”*

Looking back, George would realize it was merely the truth that urged him to type what he’d sent to Dream. He subconsciously longed for a friendship with Clay; the other boy was magnanimously amicable, and it was slightly hurtful to think about that he’d never be friends with him.

“ lmao yeah, hope you befriend your person tho ”

“ you too !! :) ”

“@dreamwastaken reacted to your message with: <3”

chapter two.

George feels like he might have a heart attack as the lunch bell rings, dismissing everyone to the cafeteria. As usual, he heads to the library instead with his debate binder clutched in his hands, resigning himself to another meal in the library. The tournament, he knew, was today, and he wasn't taking any risks with an unfinished annotation of his case.

Taking bites of a sandwich in between clicks of pens and swooshes of highlighter marks across his notes, George quickly spends the half hour he's allotted for lunch steadily finishing the last of his notes, a satisfied smile crossing his face as he dots his last 'i'.

He's closing his ever-so-familiar binder when it happens.

Clay walks into the library, face closed off and hood of his grey hoodie pulled up. He settles into the chair at the table a little ways across from George, pulling a thick textbook out from his backpack and immediately opening it.

And George doesn't know why he's staring, but as he looks, he can't help but notice the way that the sunlight catches whatever locks of Clay's hair that aren't hidden away, dancing on them and pulling out the blonde in such a flattering way. And then the quarterback looks up, and the world seems to dazzle for a minute as the striking green in Clay's eyes shines in the rays coming through the high window between the shelves sitting behind George. And George swears he can feel his heart soar, like a bird freeing itself from a cage that he didn't even know existed.

Until a cough from a nearby student brings George back to Earth, and he tears his eyes from Clay, and he realizes exactly the thoughts that had raced through his mind as he'd gazed from afar.

It was just the adrenaline of the upcoming competition making him think like that, hope like that, believe like that. Just the anxiety riddling his heart rate, making it beat faster, George reasoned with himself, hands flying up to his face as a self-conscious flush flies over the apples of his cheeks. The possibility of anything else, he'd run from.

The end of the day seems to creep up onto him like invasive vines growing through cracks on a building, him finding himself running through a mass of speaking points silently in his head when he knew he should've been concentrating on the work in front of him.

"Okay, crew," he addresses his team in front of him with a tight smile on his face, pulling at the sleeves of the sweater his mother liked to call 'casually formal' and standing up from his rather cramped position in between two bus seats. "You know the drill, sit with your partners and run cases on the bus, okay? Just because we're sharing a bus this time around doesn't make it any different from the usual."

"Elmswood High! Let's go!" A loud voice calls.

George knew, even without looking, exactly which team had arrived on the bus. He swears under his breath as he turns around.

"Do well, or whatever, nerd league!" A chuckling, broad-shouldered football player jabs at them as he walks past to the back of the bus.

"For fuck's sake-" George begins, but doesn't get very far as Clay boards the bus.

And all of a sudden, the rush in his face comes back. Had he always felt this way around him? Just

denying it, pushing it away out of fear of rejection?

He almost tells the blonde to stop when the entire football team starts blasting loud hip-hop in the back of the bus, but he doesn't want to start drama, so he merely opens Twitter and tweets out a: "*literally anyone else >>>> the people i'm with right now lmao* ", simmering exasperation fueled even more by the fact that none of the team can properly concentrate on running their cases.

A moment later, the ever-so-familiar reply from @dreamwastaken comes up on his screen. "*it'll be ok! dm? :D* "

George smiles and opens up his and Dream's private messages, sending a simple "*hey :)* "

"@dreamwastaken: *everything ok?* "

"@GeorgeNotFound: *yeah, just stressed about something coming up bc the people i'm with are kinda getting in the way of me preparing the most i can for it :/*"

"@dreamwastaken: *aw, i'm sorry about that. but i'm sure you did enough! you'll be great at whatever it is :)* "

George couldn't seem to stop the smile on his face as he typed back, contemplated, and sent it.

"@GeorgeNotFound: *ever wonder if you like someone you have no chance with or if you're just misinterpreting something that isn't a big deal?* "

"@dreamwastaken: *kinda. there's that irl i was talking to you about. i dunno if i just want to be friends with them really bad or... idk.* "

A moment later, another message: "*nvm, i take that back lmao. him and i barely know each other.*"

"@GeorgeNotFound: *i get that.* "

He briefly thought about his friendship with Dream. They'd met a bit ago in the replies of a shared favorite celebrity's Tweet about coding, and had hit it off ever since.

Dream was always able to make George happier, lift his spirits when he was stressed, sad, in a mood. And George hoped he did the same for him.

"@GeorgeNotFound: *i hope i make you as happy as you make me. minecraft tomorrow? :)* "

"@dreamwastaken: *i can say you make me very happy :D minecraft tomorrow works for me, just msg me on discord!*"

George exits out of his DMs and smiles to himself, feeling encouraged by his close friend's words.

Clay cheers as he enters the locker room later that night, clapping Sapnap on the back and whooping with victorious joy. "We won!"

Sapnap grins broadly back at him. "All thanks to you, big man," he laughs.

The rest of his teammates congratulate him with similar sentiments as they change and shower, all giddy with the glow of the win.

"Bringing home the bacon, boys," their coach flashes a rare smile at them as they sit in the locker

room with their bags. “Proud of you guys for clutching that win. We can’t leave just yet, though,” he grimaces as a chorus of groans erupts from the team. “The debaters are going till 9:30, and the bus can’t leave without them, so I signed us up to spectate the rest of their tournament-” he’s interrupted by a muscular student opening his mouth, but he successfully cuts the sentence off before any objecting noise is made. “No, Matt, you aren’t allowed to call a recess in their round to call them nerds. Yes, I know your friend did that last time.”

Against his better judgment, Clay laughs, but is quickly silenced by a signature glare from his coach.

“Just because you brought home the win doesn’t mean everything’s sunshine and daisies for you, son,” he says seriously.

Clay meekly accepts his coach’s words.

So, fifteen minutes later, him and his ten other teammates shuffle across the school’s gym bleachers, huffing about how boring it’ll be to sit for another hour.

The quarterback’s frustration at the situation grows as he pulls his phone out and realizes it’s died sometime during his game. “Shit,” he mutters, showing Sappap his dead phone.

“That blows,” Sappap whispers back.

“Yeah,” Clay musters. Watching the tournament wouldn’t be that boring now, would it be?

“Cross-examination will now begin,” a severe-looking judge announces, shuffling her papers and opening a binder. “First rebuttal will be in three minutes.”

From across the gym, he can see George stand up, clicking his pen as he finishes writing something down quickly on a sheet of paper, looking at it for a split second before beginning to speak. “In your Smith 2007 card, you mentioned how the infrastructure of the United States leads to a natural divide in class. But we’re arguing for a raise in the minimum wage. How do you think raising wages will lead to a topple in economic infrastructure?”

And the realization hits him, slowly but surely. George isn’t... unattractive when he’s confident, assertive, sweeping his steely brown-eyed gaze over his opponents. Clay isn’t the receiver of his glare, but he knows it digs deep when the other team’s standing speaker falters as they try to answer the question. He’s surprised, confused even, at his realization, letting his gaze flit back and forth multiple times over George’s figure, his arms, his *hands*, so delicate and slender, hands that would fit like a puzzle piece in his. Brown tufts of hair framing his face quite nicely, though it’s short.

Did- did he *like* George?

If he were to confront the truth, the other student was... well, he’d admit it. Attractive. Especially as he worked hard, asserted himself, pushed himself towards his goals, however unattainable they seemed to onlookers. He admired that about George. His tenacity.

His heart rate did seem to quicken in the short minutes he’d been thinking about it. But it was too soon to be sure. Clay knew he could find someone attractive without liking them. But why did he want to be friends with George so bad? Funnily enough, no one knew his secret yearn to befriend the quietly intellectual brunette except for his friend on Twitter, who coincidentally had the same name.

He wondered if the two Georges looked alike.

Later that night (after a comforting double win for their school), Clay drafts and sends a single Tweet: “ *wondering if i like irl.* ”

A reply from his faithful best friend on the app rolls in a few minutes later. “@GeorgeNotFound: *similar situation here :/*”

Clay smiles and immediately feels reassured by the shared experience. “@dreamwastaken: *i think i’m gonna see if it’s really a crush tomorrow because idrk about it. i’ve just never really seen him like i saw him today yk?* ”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *same!! the sun hit his face once today like i need to calm down lmao*”

“@dreamwastaken: *yes! i watched him talk for three whole minutes today and simpd... whatever. i’ll update you tomorrow*”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *good luck! gn! <3* ”

Clay laughs a little, but the smile leaves his face quickly as he switches apps and checks his AP US Government grade.

It had dropped from an 86 to a 70, and as he clicked the drop-down tab he immediately knew: he’d done poorly on the most recent test on the role of government in the economy.

The role of government in the economy.

The topic that he’d just watched George win a debate on, absolutely decimating the other team with a simple steel-hard glare and a few diatribal words.

That was it; he’d put his thoughts that he’d had to the test tomorrow by asking George to tutor him in AP Government.

Stupidly, he knew there was a big chance George would completely decline; it wasn’t every day that the guy who’d called you a nerd in the hallway consistently for the last four years suddenly shelved his pride and asked you for help.

But he had to know. He hated leaving things untouched, incomplete, without a sure knowledge of exactly how he felt, what he knew.

When he was a kid, his mother had always ruffled his hair and complimented him on his seemingly endless curiosity, always asking “why?” or “who?” or “where?” to every other sentence that had come out of anyone’s mouth that he could hear.

He wasn’t as annoying about it now, of course, but his burn for answers to everything he could know hadn’t left him.

George doesn’t expect Clay to approach him as he’s scribbling down AP English Language notes the next day in the library, mouth mid-chew as he writes quickly.

“Hello,” his voice floats through his ears, causing him to startle a little as he looks up.

“Hi?” he answers, looking up.

The eyes strike him first again, just like they had yesterday, sparks of sunlight dancing in the sharp green as they look at each other. Clay really isn't unattractive, George realizes.

But he blushes horribly at the thought of liking the other boy, much more at the fact that Clay doesn't even particularly like him, and silently cringes even harder when he realizes the other student can definitely see the pink dusting his face. "Can I, uh, help you?" he manages, looking back down at his notes in a desperate attempt to appear somewhat uninterested, though the questions streaming through his head a mile a minute yell otherwise.

"Uh," Clay puts a hand awkwardly on the back of his neck, but George quickly takes notice of the way the long-sleeved shirt he's wearing hugs around his toned arm in all the right ways. "I was, um, wondering if you could help me?" he asks quietly, voice fading up into a question before falling completely silent.

George creases his eyebrows together in confusion, and against his better judgment, looks up again, straight into the green that makes him feel like he's drowning in the best way. "With what?"

"Well," Clay begins, still as awkward as ever, though, God forbid, George has begun to find it slightly endearing. "I didn't do well on my last AP Gov test, and I saw you win the debate talking about the exact topic the test was on, you know? So I was wondering, uh, if you could maybe tutor me?" he manages to get out, flushing a similar pink to George as he looks away and down at his feet. "Midterms are coming up, too, and I really don't want to flunk those."

The brown-eyed student is so taken aback that he nearly doesn't answer. He'd never remembered ever seeing Clay shelve his pride in this way, figuratively lowering himself to George's level to ask for help. "Um," George begins, mentally slapping himself the way his debate coach surely would at seeing him flounder for what to say. "I guess- I mean, sure? My season's over, so I have time, uh..." he trails off, confusion slowly leaving his face as Clay lets a small yet excited smile peek through his features.

"Okay, uh, yeah! Great! Thank you! I'll- I guess I'll see you tomorrow? Here?" he asks tentatively.

"Sure?" George confusedly smiles back.

"irl and i? got along today lmao? it was so weird bc i've never seen him act that... humble"
George tweets out before he goes to bed that night, laying in the dark and thinking about what had happened.

A moment later, the expected reply from @dreamwastaken: *"that's so cool! i talked to my irl today, and... george, i think i'm screwed /hj"*

George quickly moves the conversation to DMs. *"what?"* he types, hitting 'send' quickly.

"@dreamwastaken: you don't get it he actually wants to help me and i think he's pretty"

"@GeorgeNotFound: are you seriously crushing on someone you've had one full conversation with"

"@dreamwastaken: well i called him names a lot in the past but now that i think about it i think it was just because i found him really interesting and i just didn't know how to say it"

George's mind immediately flies to Clay, like it had been so frequently recently. He scoffs in mild amused annoyance.

"@GeorgeNotFound: i'd apologize for that first jesus"

“@dreamwastaken: *i'm gonna, especially because he's helping me now* ”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *good luck with that one LMAO* ”

“@dreamwastaken: *i'm going to bed and definitely thinking about this more tomorrow*”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *gn lmao* ”

chapter three.

He's surprised by the change in attitude that Clay shows him, the first time they tutor together.

"You're... you're actually not going to call me a name," George laughs, skeptical as he opens the textbook the other boy's given him.

Clay laughs as well, just as confused. "Why would I call you a name? You're the one actually putting time into helping me. Which, uh, speaking of name-calling, I just- I wanted to say I'm sorry for all the times I was rude to you for no reason?" his voice turns up into a flustered, questioning tone as their eyes meet.

But the green is soft, honest, true.

George feels like all the breath's been knocked out of his chest for a second before he looks away. "Um," he begins, noticing that around Clay, he unintentionally breaks quite a lot of the speech rules he's been rigidly holding himself to ever since he's been on the debate team. "I- thank you?"

Clay gives him an unreadable look as he just nods silently, matching tentative smiles breaking on both their faces until they're both giggling together.

"Okay," George laughs. "The role of government isn't hard to understand once you break it down into federal and state powers," he explains. "Block grants go to the states from the central federal government."

He watches as the sun catches Clay's hair again.

Clay makes George's heart beat faster.

He nearly doesn't catch the question tumbling out of the other student's lips, as their eyes meet again and the green swallows him whole.

"Do block grants need mandates to go through?"

George coughs to cover up the stumble in his voice. "No, they don't, that's a different type of grant." And to make it more believable, at least in his mind, he grabs at his water bottle to take a sip.

Only, when he puts the water bottle back, Clay goes to take a different colored pen.

And in that moment, everything was electricity. Skin on skin, hand brushing hand.

"Oh-" George begins, quickly pulling his hand back. But the water bottle starts to tip over, so he puts his hand back. Right under Clay's, as Clay drops the pen to catch the nearly-spilling bottle.

"Um-"

"I-"

"Sorry-"

But both of them don't move for a few seconds. The ticking of the clock in the quiet library, ambience of other students coughing and shuffling papers, sharp clicks of keyboards falls and melts away as they look at each other.

It breaks when Clay takes his hand away, removing the blanket of warmth on top of George's smaller, more delicate hand as he coughs again. "Um, I'm glad that didn't spill."

George laughs quickly, feeling his heartbeat betray him as it so regularly had been for the past week now, trying to assume a sense of normalcy as his world spins with a dizzying rush of dangerous hope around him. "Yeah," he mumbles. "So- so anyways, here's your pen," he reaches and grabs the pen that Clay's dropped, holding it out to him.

And the moment happens all over again, at least for George. He has no idea of knowing whether Clay feels the same way as his fingers trace onto the back of his colder, paler hand to take the pen from his grip. But he swears his hand goes from frigid to burning as he feels the other student's touch on his skin, "Uh-" he stutters again, before definitely overcompensating and grabbing at a farther stack of notes that he spent far too long meticulously preparing a few months ago before the debate season had started. "I have these notes," he began, a little too loudly as the people around him turned and glared. "Sorry," he lowered the volume of his voice quickly, cringing silently. "I prepped these, like, before our season began. They're actually on the role of government in interstate trade. I used them during the tournament," he laughs a little, amused at the memory of the win they'd brought home that night. "But, uh," he continues shakily. "I think they might help? If you want them?"

His handwriting is neat and short, running sharp lines across the paper, dashes of highlighted words popping out. "It- it's okay if you don't want them, though," he quickly pulls his outstretched hand back, as he'd been doing so often for the last few minutes. "They're a lot to-"

"No, I'd love them," Clay hurriedly takes them from George's hand, though this time their skin doesn't meet for a glancing brush. He can't help but feel a flicker of disappointment at that. "I'll take them, thank you," the green-eyed boy smiles shyly, pulling the papers gently from George's grasp and storing them away into a folder labeled "Government" in blocky letters.

"Okay. Yeah. Okay," George must've slapped himself mentally for stuttering at least thirty times already. Somehow, Clay had the power to make him feel as though he were about to deliver a speech to a room full of people, even though it was just the two of them.

Clay laughs a little. "So," he starts. "The grants you were talking about?"

George lets out a relieved chuckle. Relax, he told himself. It was just Clay. But it was hard to calm his sprinting heart rate as he looked into the other student's eyes and back down again at the textbook. "Right here," he points. "The definition of 'mandates' in relation to government-issued grants is in bold."

Clay says nothing, save only for a small "thanks" before copying down the words in the textbook onto a sheet of paper.

The rest of their lunch period goes by meanderingly as George walks him through the first two chapters of the unit.

"What's the midterm on?" he asks, placing his things back into his bookbag as the bell rings.

"Oh," Clay says. "Uh, Units 1-4, but I forget everything before this unit," he laughs sheepishly.

George rolls his eyes, but the smile on his face betrays him. "That's not good, you know?"

"Well, which is why I'm asking you for help."

"I guess my nerdiness comes in handy to you now, huh?"

“Shut up.”

“@dreamwastaken: *how are you? i’m crying /pos* ”

George grinned at the message popping up on the screen of his phone, shrugging his backpack off before typing out a reply. “@GeorgeNotFound: *i’m doing good! irl and i... held hands today??* ”

“@dreamwastaken: *lucky!! irl read a book with me today, kinda. it was a textbook. but the sentiment’s still there.* ”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *first date? oomf went on his first study date?* ”

“@dreamwastaken: *shhhh* ”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *hop on minecraft?* ”

“@dreamwastaken: *sure* ”

He loaded the game up quickly on his monitor, drumming his fingers with excitement as ‘Dream joined the game’ flashed in the bottom corner.

“GeorgeNotFound: *hi oomf*”

“Dream: *gonna pretend like you didn’t just call me your oomf in a block game. are we finishing the house today?* ”

“GeorgeNotFound: *duh* ”

The pair worked quickly, stopping every once in a while to playfully punch at each other’s avatars in between harvesting wood and building the quaint cottage-style house they’d put together after a few days of steady progress.

It was nice to have a break from reality, George realized. So much of his time was taken up by studying, or thinking (more recently, almost exclusively about Clay and his nagging, but growing, feelings for him). He placed the final brick block in the last empty space, jumping around a bit and punching Dream’s avatar playfully.

“GeorgeNotFound: *we’re done!*”

“Dream: *will you place your bed next to mine* ”

“GeorgeNotFound: *you don’t even have to ask*”

“Dream: *so glad we’re minecraft boyfriends* ”

George rolls his eyes and lets himself mess around with Dream for a bit more before logging off, remembering the weight of responsibility that weighed his backpack down.

Only, he opens his pencil case to a slip of paper with ten digits scrawled on it.

“ *Text me :) -Clay* ”

George nearly faints, he blushes so hard. Reaching for his phone quickly, he punches in the number and sends a heavily-contemplated, twice-deleted: “ *is this clay?* ”

The three dots immediately fly up, a response flying back: “ *yeah lmao, i wanted to keep in contact with you* ”

George frowns in slight confusion, but then realizes and types back: “ *oh wait so you can ask me questions and stuff right* ”

“ *well yeah but also because i want to talk to you* ”

He knows it’s nothing to overthink, but he can’t help the race that his thoughts start running. What did it mean, to want to talk to someone? Did it mean interest, exclusively? Or was it something that should just be interpreted at face value?

He types, deletes, and then types again. “ *who said i wanted to talk to you?* ”

“ *you do, you’ve never had a friend as cool as me* ”

“ *fuck off* ”

But George would be lying to himself if he said that the conversation didn’t leave him smiling dumbly at his phone, feeling like a child again as he felt his face heat up and stomach flutter at the small exchange.

chapter four.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The school library is, at best, severely understocked with good books, in George's opinion. But he nuances his thoughts with the knowledge that he isn't there specifically to read, he's there to get work done. Which made him feel slightly better the first time he sat in the tall room, scribbling onto his speech cards and eating his lunch alone.

But the library is beautiful to George now, as he desperately tries to keep a laugh from exploding out of him as Clay cracks a joke. In between giggles, he manages a small "shut up".

"Aren't you supposed to be helping me with my midterm?" Clay snorts, chiding George silently by taking his pencil case and holding it above his head. "This is what you get for not doing anything for me, George," he laughs easily.

George rolls his eyes, but the smile doesn't ever leave his face as he fires back.

"Last I remember, you were thanking me for bagging you a 90 on your last test."

Clay flushes pink, caught in the fallacy of his own argument. "Well- shit," he mutters, before falling into a sheepish silence.

George takes his moment of hesitation to snatch the pencil case back. "Ha, and you lose again to the twice-undefeated debate captain," he gloats.

Clay smirks, and George immediately knows that he's about to start another round of banter with him. "Well, oh-so-mighty debate captain," he grins. "I bet you have no other interests or hobbies. Unlike me, who's a perfectly well-rounded student that, you know, actually has friends," he quips.

"Whatever," George scoffs, only he's slightly piqued by what Clay likes to do when he's not playing football. "Just explain the prison-industrial complex to me again, so I know you have it memorized."

"Uh," Clay begins. "I..."

George sighs. "Clay, the prison-industrial complex is the overlap between private businesses and prisons, which directly benefits said businesses when inflated incarceration occurs."

The other student sighs and repeats what George has just said back to him. "Happy?"

The brunette smiles. "Very."

Clay's silent for a minute as he writes the definition down, but turns to George quickly and pipes up again. "Seriously, what do you-"

But he's interrupted as the bell rings and they're forced to pack up.

"What were you going to say?" George tries asking, as he crams his books into his bag.

"Oh, it's nothing big, don't worry about it," Clay shrugs. "See you here tomorrow?"

"Definitely, because you can't seem to remember definitions for the life of you."

“Shut it.”

“George: *what were you going to ask me in the library today?*”

“Clay: *i wanted you to tell me about debate, i talk about myself so much and i wanted to ask about what you like to do for once lmao*”

George can feel himself blush as he walks into his home, typing back and deleting. Clay wanted to know about him. He found it endearing. But he doesn't know how to answer the question; they both know they don't have much in common.

“George: *uhh, debate's pretty cool. we do policy debate, so that means we have eight-minute speeches and three-minute cross-ex slots*”

The three dots pop up and go away a few times before Clay sends back a simple: “*huh, sounds cool*”

But he knows the other boy feels it too. The conversation is dry, unlike a conversation they've ever had before. Usually the topics ricochet, the texts flying back and forth as they make each other laugh through their phone screens. It makes him nervous. Would the tentative bond they'd formed crack upon itself?

George likes the text and opens up Twitter, where he sees an unopened DM from Dream.

“@dreamwastaken: *george i need your advice*”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *what is it*”

“@dreamwastaken: *i'm trying to get to know my irl better bc i feel bad for always talking about myself bc i don't want him to think that i'm self-centered but we have literally nothing in common*”

Just then, a notification from Minecraft's Twitter pops up on George's screen. He quickly clicks on it and reads. “Cave Update!” it says, along with a bunch of new features that would soon be coming to the game below it.

He sends the tweet immediately to Dream.

“@GeorgeNotFound sent a Tweet: *ok let's talk about your love life later WE'RE FINALLY GETTING A CAVE UPDATE!!!*”

“@dreamwastaken: *HOLY SHIT I JUST SAW THAT*”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *wait dream that's it! ask him if he likes minecraft! then if he does you guys can play together!*”

“@dreamwastaken: *george what if he thinks i'm a huge nerd:*

“@GeorgeNotFound: *didn't you say this kid was in debate? i'm in debate and i still like minecraft. also i don't think you think i'm a huge nerd, so...*”

@dreamwastaken: *... okay you got me there. he also has the same name as you, kinda trippy*”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *do we look alike*”

“@dreamwastaken: *you've literally never shown me your face and i don't think you plan on it soon*”

“@GeorgeNotFound: *ok true* ”

“Do you like Minecraft?” Clay randomly asks George the next day.

George laughs to himself as he remembers the conversation he’d had with Dream yesterday. “Uh, I play it, yeah.”

“Why’d you laugh?” Clay’s face is brushed over with a confused smile.

“Oh,” George says. “Nothing, I just had a conversation about Minecraft yesterday with someone and it reminds me of this.”

Clay falls silent for a minute as he thoughtfully flips through a few pages in his textbook. “We should play together after school.”

George thinks about the invitation. It was gratifying to find something that they shared in common after yesterday’s stifled conversation, reassuring that the temporary disconnect he’d felt didn’t affect them that much. “We can,” he eventually agrees, and then looks down at his watch. “Now keep copying down the definition of ‘divided government’, we only have ten minutes left before the bell rings.”

The ambience of the library falls like a warm blanket wrapping both of them up together, pages turning and students whispering filling George’s ears as he watches the green-eyed boy flip the pages of his textbook.

“What’s your favorite block in Minecraft?” Clay asks as he writes, a small smile on his face.

George chuckles. “Um, I like the dandelions, if that counts.”

Clay laughs. “What?”

“They’re just- they’re small, and yellow, okay?” George pouts, but a giggle breaks through as Clay begins to talk about how he likes the in-game roses.

But George finds it nice, because Clay’s face lights up in such a way when he talks about things that he likes.

“You’ll ace the midterm,” George reassures as the bell rings and he begins to put his stuff away.

“It’s not until next week,” Clay replies, a tinge of confusion hitting his voice.

“I know, but you’ve improved a lot, and I think you have it down.”

The smile that breaks onto the blonde’s face is soft, blushing, taken aback, true.

“Thanks,” he murmurs. “Um,” Clay clears his throat. “So, call me after school?”

“Uh,” George stumbles on his words, still recovering from the smile that he’d seemingly been stricken by. “Yeah.”

He thinks he’s been nervous before for his tournaments, but that’s nothing compared to the anxious excitement he feels building throughout the day after lunch, anticipation building for what would happen after school. What would calling Clay be like? Would it be the same as their furiously funny library conversations? Or, God forbid, it’d be as dry as the texts they’d exchanged

yesterday?

He quickly sends Dream a DM as his fifth period ends.

“@GeorgeNotFound: *dream holy shit my irl and i are hanging out after school*”

“@dreamwastaken: *YO congrats!! tell me all about it after you’re done :)*”

He immediately feels better after texting Dream, glad that he has someone to share his feelings with, even for just a fleeting second.

It scared him, the possibility of things going awry later.

A single text pings his phone an hour after he gets home.

“Clay: *call me ?*”

George takes a deep breath, and forces his trembling finger onto the “FaceTime” button.

“Hi,” Clay immediately picks up and waves.

George lets a laugh bubble up. “Hi,” he stammers. “Uh, do you have a multiplayer world?”

Clay nods, and he can tell how subtly excited he is. “I actually started an SMP, but I’ve only whitelisted, like, one other person on it, so I can whitelist you and we can play on it together. What’s your username?” he asks as he props his phone up, the glow of his monitor screen visible on his face.

George sits down and quickly loads Minecraft onto his computer. “Uh, it’s GeorgeNotFound, with no hyphens or anything.”

Clay falls silent. “Wait,” he says, “Are you...” he begins skeptically, eyebrows furrowing in visible confusion.

“What?” George asks. “Send me the IP, would you?”

“Hold on,” the green-eyed boy says. “Do you have Twitter?”

“Uh,” the brunette says. “Yeah, I do, but none of the people from school follow me.”

Clay begins to laugh. “And it’s the same username?”

“Yeah,” George says confusedly. “Why are you laughing?”

The text with the IP pops up on his phone screen, and he quickly types it in and joins the game. “Clay, what’s so-”

But he stops talking as Clay’s avatar appears on his screen. And it’s familiar.

Above the avatar, the username: “Dream”.

George closes his eyes and opens them again, unsure if what he’s seeing is real. “You’re- you’re- what the hell?” he begins to laugh with Clay. “Have we really known each other this entire time?” he asks, partly to himself.

“I- I guess?” Clay wheezes.

It's like the same thought hits them both. A stone, thrown at them by the unseen forces of attraction and something else, something unnamed.

"You're- I'm the one you've been tweeting about, aren't I?" George's voice falls to a tentative mumble as he looks down, knowing that Clay is drawing the same conclusion.

"And you're the one I've been tweeting about," the other boy murmurs.

The realization hits them. It was true, the fleeting feelings they'd been having around each other, the quickening of the heartbeats, the reluctance to pull their hands away every time they'd brushed against each other.

"Um," George begins. "I- I get it if you don't want to be friends with me anymore," he says quietly. "It is pretty weird to know that the guy you've been talking to for the last few weeks... has been secretly tweeting about you?" his voice turns up into a questioning tone as he contemplates the situation.

Clay is silent.

The quiet stretches over them as George refuses to look at his phone, instead looking down at his fingernails and picking at them, having nothing else to do as he tries to pretend like it doesn't matter.

"No," Clay eventually says, unsure but strong in tone of voice. "I- I want to do this, George," he keeps going. "I know how you feel, and- and you know how I feel- well, at least I hope it's been obvious enough," he laughs quietly. "Go out with me?"

George's breath catches in his throat. "Are- are you sure?" his voice is barely above a whisper, hope blossoming like a vine in his chest as he lets himself feel, feel so much that it nearly swallows him, feel the things he'd been trying to deny for weeks now, unsure if they were true.

"Yes." His response is simple, but everything that George needs to hear.

A flustered laugh breaks its way through his lips. "Okay," he smiles, finally looking up and catching Clay's green eyes looking back at him through his screen.

Chapter End Notes

thank you so much for reading!
for future works, check my twitter: @gogyisnotonfire
-j.

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